

## Core Modals As Pragmatic Markers In Literary Discourse And Their Pedagogical Implications: A Systemic Fungsional Perspective

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**Abstract:** This is a systemic functional study of the use of the items of pragmatic markers in a literary discourse. The aims of this study are to identify, analyze and describe the ways the items of pragmatic markers are used. Their contextual meanings, functions, and implication to the pedagogical attempts are also unfolded. The results of the interpretative and descriptive analysis reveal that the items of the core modals serving as pragmatic markers are found to be very dominant which also suggests that the genre of narrative fiction is linguistically characterized by the utterances that are established on the basis of knowledge and reasoning. The items of pragmatic markers are found to be polysemous and polyfunctional which are reflected pragmatically in the forms of politeness, negotiative and constructive functions. All these lead to the acknowledgement that the use of the items of pragmatic markers in literary discourse is important and their usage for language teaching in the applied linguistic contexts is worth conducting.

**Keywords:** Cognitive pragmatics, Pragmatic markers, Literary discourse, Pedagogical implication.

**Abstrak:** Kajian ini adalah kajian systemic functional terhadap penggunaan penanda pragmatik pada wacana sastra dengan tujuan untuk mengidentifikasi, menganalisis dan mendeskripsikan cara penanda pragmatik dipergunakan. Makna kontekstual, fungsi dan implikasi pedagogisnya juga diungkap. Hasil analisis interpretatif dan diskriptif mengungkapkan bahwa item *core modals* yang secara gramatikal menjadi penanda pragmatik ditemukan sangat dominan, dan hal ini menunjukkan bahwa karya sastra ber-genre fiksi naratif dibangun dengan ungkapan-ungkapan yang secara linguistik berbasis pada pengetahuan dasar dan argumen. Item-item penanda pragmatik dengan kategori ini bersifat multi-makna dan multi-fungsi yang secara pragmatik direfleksikan dalam bentuk fungsi kesopanan, negosiatif dan konstruktif. Hal ini menandakan bahwa penggunaan penanda pragmatik pada wacana sastra sangat penting dan penerapannya pada pembelajaran bahasa dengan konteks linguistik terapan perlu diterapkan.

**Kata kunci:** Kognitif pragmatik, penanda pragmatik, wacana sastra, implikasi pedagogis.

### INTRODUCTION

Various definitions of pragmatic markers have been put forward including the broad idea of “the manner in which the meaning of a clause is qualified so as to reflect the speaker’s judgment of the likelihood of the proposition of the sentence being true” (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, and Svartvik, 1985: 219). The other definition of pragmatic markers is put forward by Halliday (1970: 356) says “pragmatic markers refers to the areas of meaning that lies between yes and no—the intermediate ground between positive and negative polarity” as well as “the speaker’s assessment of the probability of what he is saying.” In the context of this current paper, the most common one is that pragmatic markers covers the idea of the writer’s attitude toward what he writes in his literary work.

From linguistic point of view, pragmatic markers are considered to be the linguistic structure that evaluates the state of affair. In this case, pragmatic markers refers to the “aspects of meaning which cause sentences to be about the non-factual, that is, about the alternative possibilities for how things could be” (Fasold and Connor-Linton, 2006: 153). Meanwhile, as a semantic-grammatical category, pragmatic markers are interpreted as the relativization of the meanings of a sentence to the set of possible worlds or ways in which people might think of the world to be different. In other words, pragmatic markers allows language users to express *what is*, *what would be*, *what may be*, and *what should be* which can be expressed either through grammatical mood or modal systems or both to make

pragmatic markers a "valid cross-language grammatical category" (Palmer, 2001: 1).

Semantically, pragmatic markers may cover an open-ended list of modal utterances, from the 'core modals' to the 'peripheral modals' (Bybee and Fleishman, 1995). This could range from the basic forms of modals such as *can*, *may*, *will*, *shall*, and *must* up to non-modal verbs such as *I think*, *I believe*, *I reckon*, and so on; adjectives such as *it is possible*, *it is probable*; adverbs such as *possibly*, *probably*; or nouns such as *certainty*, *possibility*, and so on. However, there is a closed set of verbs which are formally, semantically, and syntactically identifiable as the items of pragmatic markers which is often found to be so complex that "there is, perhaps, no area of English grammar that is both more important and more difficult than the system of modals" (Palmer, 1990: viii).

Pragmatically, pragmatic markers is concerned with the speaker's or writer's assessment or attitude towards the potentiality of a state of affairs (Papafragou, 2000). Thus, the use of modals in a language expression may indicate modal attitudes that apply to the world of things and social interaction. Such a type of pragmatic markers is known as root pragmatic markers (Radden and Dirven, 2007) which comprises three subtypes: deontic pragmatic markers, intrinsic pragmatic markers and disposition pragmatic markers. Pragmatic markers are concerned with the speaker's directive attitude towards an action to be carried out. Intrinsic pragmatic markers deals with the potentialities arising from intrinsic qualities of a thing or circumstance. Meanwhile, pragmatic markers are concerned with the intrinsic potential of a thing or person to be actualized.

Most studies on pragmatic markers have been based on the linguistic perspective with non-literary texts being the objects. For example, to demonstrate the distinctive patterns of pragmatic markers in media discourse, Iwamoto (1998) focused on newspaper articles. Moreover, to convey a lower degree of certainty and commitment on the writer's part with regard to the propositional content, the writers are found to use the lower value of the items of pragmatic markers such as *maybe*, *although* and the like.

How the items of linguistic pragmatic markers, especially those which are categorized as pragmatic markers, are used in literary discourse is important to be studied. Such a study may suggest that analyzing pragmatic markers in a literary work that uncovers human relations is important to conduct. In so doing, this paper employs a cognitive pragmatic approach (Radden and Dirven, 2007; Bara, 2010) because the meanings, functions, and utilization of the items of linguistic pragmatic markers in the verbal language expressions involve cognitive pragmatic processes (Patard and Brisard, 2011). This implies that cognition should be very dominant in the selection of

a certain item of verbal linguistic pragmatic markers which is pragmatically used in the linguistic expressions of the discourse.

The term cognitive here is interpreted to concern the observation that language is actually one of the essential elements of human mental activity. In this case, language is understood as something that must be established on a high-level cognitive infrastructure that makes it possible to produce and interpret it in the brain (Dirven and Verspoor, 2004). Meanwhile, the term pragmatic is often related to the observation that language has a specific role to play (Kecskes and Horn, 2007). In this context, language is not the only type of human behavior which serves this purpose, but it is considered to be the most sophisticated one, at least in terms of the possibilities it offers for transmitting complex patterns of information. Hence, investigating the linguistic manifestation of pragmatic markers here also unavoidably means accounting for how this system fulfills the communicative function of language expressions (Daalder and Musolff, 2011).

## METHODS

The main objective of this paper is to identify and analyze the usage of the items of pragmatic markers that are found and used in literary discourse which is represented here by a narrative fiction *Not About Nothingales*. Since the presentation of the results of the analysis is in the form of the description of the data then the research for this paper belongs to the qualitative type. In the context of this paper qualitative research deals with the interpretation of the phenomenon and meaning of the events in the literary discourse in which the interpretation of the results of the analyses of the data refers to the linguistic, cultural and literary conventions. These conventions require that the qualitative data need to be supported by quantitative features which are obtained through counting the frequency of the occurrence of linguistic items categorized as the items of linguistic pragmatic markers.

As one of the ways or perspectives of analyzing the use of the items of pragmatic markers, cognitive pragmatic perspective takes this observation to heart in the sense that it assumes that an adequate account of language in general, and of linguistic phenomenon in particular, has to do with both dimensions simultaneously. In a more practical sense, this study was based on the principles of a content analysis as it is developed by Dornyei (2007) and Krippendorff (2014). In this case, the textual dialogues of the mentioned narrative fiction are scrutinized in detailed to identify the linguistic items that have been categorized as the items of pragmatic markers. This means that the researcher tries to identify and analyze the types, meanings and functions of the items of pragmatic markers as well as the possible pedagogical implications in the acquisition of linguistic pragmatic markers.

The data of this research are collected by the use of close reading and quoting techniques. The use of these techniques necessitate that the researcher as the key instrument to read the literary discourse carefully and quoted the words, phrases and clauses which belong to the members of linguistic pragmatic markers. It is these words, phrases and clauses which are then made up the primary data of this study.

In order to ensure the validity of the data and the trustworthiness of the results of the analysis of the data, the researcher tried to reduce the possible biases or deficiencies by applying triangulation procedure. This activity is performed because there is always a possibility that a certain item of pragmatic markers may belong to the other categories of pragmatic markers. This means that the data are grouped in a corpus-type format in accordance with the possible similarity and differences, so that the types, meanings, functions of the items of pragmatic markers and the setting up possible pedagogical implications are visible.

In addition, the analysis and description of the meanings of pragmatic markers was further based on the concepts of pragmatic markers as serving to express the notions of agent-oriented and speaker-oriented pragmatic markers, that is, the ones elaborated by de Haan (2006) and Radden and Dirven (2007). Meanwhile, the functions of the items of pragmatic markers are identified and analyzed following the concept of cognitive and interactional function of modals (Choi, 1995) as well as by looking at the concept of macro-functions of language expressions developed.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the general observation and analysis on the usage of the items of pragmatic markers in *Not About Nigthingales* could help identify Henry James's psychical complexes with those of his characters. These also help to understand that Henry James wants to de-emphasize his conscious management of his readers' inferences and he suggests the importance of the individual characters' points of view.

The use of the items of pragmatic markers here also helps to understand that Henry James is often satirical. For example, many of his minor characters in the narrative fiction are found almost as summarily categorized as less powerful. However, satire is not James's chief end, and it seems that the characters are left themselves to develop their language expressions, including the use of the items of pragmatic markers, through which James express his central themes. It can be described here that James gave the readers a sort of characters of "all-objective" (Meisner, 2004: 39), and that objectivity is a goal in James's hermeneutics.

In addition to the finding that linguistic pragmatic markers in a literary work tends to be subjective and objective (Kirvalidze, 2006), one

important finding of this current study is that Henry James used more subjective pragmatic markers than the objective one to create a unique and aesthetic image of the world. The subjective pragmatic markers have been made as the organizing angle by which Henry James represented reality in its most fitting paradigm.

The results of the descriptive analysis of the use of the items of linguistic pragmatic markers indicate that there are in total 3,362 items of verbal pragmatic markers employed by the author in the dialogues of the characters of the narrative fiction. Of this number of modal items, 1,475 items or 43.87% are concerned with root pragmatic markers and 1,887 items or 56.13% are concerned with pragmatic markers. This means that *Not about Nigthingale* is the narrative fiction which is developed (by the author) on the basis of the use of pragmatic markers which comprises of the concepts of inferentiality and evaluative orientations.

Inferentiality is found to be closely related to the world of knowledge and reasoning. In this case, evidentiality – the initialization of evidence in any conversational exchange – is put forward. In the case of inferentiality, the items of pragmatic markers are found to carry a powerful inferential dimension since the speakers draws a conclusion on the basis of the reality outside the speaker's realm. In addition, some items of pragmatic markers like *may*, *might* and *could* carry with them the inferentiality which contain judgments about the likelihood of the state of affairs, situated in the speaker's subjective realm and correspond to the paraphrasing statement such as 'I think it is likely' (Traugott, 1989: 50). In this circumstance, the speakers use the items of pragmatic markers to explicitly describe the reality in which the evaluative comment on the relevant reality is clearly based on direct evidence and may stand for both likelihood and evaluation.

The principle of evaluative orientation in this study is concerned with the favorable view of the conclusion suggested in the utterances. Furthermore, evaluative orientation offers both useful and problematic elements for the analysis of the use of pragmatic markers. This means that an inferential and an evaluative orientation implicitly suggest that the evaluation is based on inference and conversely. Thus, when the speakers evaluate the truth of the proposition of an utterance where the items of pragmatic markers are used, evaluation is actually partly detached from inference based on direct evidence and the equivalents of the truth. That is, the speakers have more flexibility to assess the state of affairs in positive, negative or neutral terms, separately from inferential knowledge.

Finally, the general usage of pragmatic markers indicates that the items of this category of pragmatic markers are used in their context just in the parameter of discourse-oriented, agent-oriented, subject-oriented, and pragmatic-oriented (Narrog, 2005). In

this current study, discourse-oriented is referred to as speaker-oriented pragmatic markers, covering the items of pragmatic markers that mark directives, such as imperatives, optatives or permissives, which represent speech acts through which a speaker attempts to move an addressee to action. In their agent-oriented usage, pragmatic markers include the meanings and functions of expressing obligation, desire, ability, permission and root possibility. Meanwhile, subject-oriented pragmatic markers are concerned with the ability or volition of the subject of the sentence, rather than the opinion or attitude. In relation to the data of this study, it is found that the items of pragmatic markers are found to be used in their pragmatic-oriented, that is, the resurrecting of the speaking self and recognizing language as a self-expression negotiated in intricately complex multi-level human interactions.

In terms of the contextual and flexible meanings and functions of pragmatic markers, this study found that most of the items of this type of pragmatic markers are used for necessity, possibility and evidentiality. In relation to these meanings and functions, pragmatic markers are interpreted on the basis of a body of information or evidence which is frequently referred to as the so-called what is known. The epistemic use of modals is interesting not only because the speaker has a body of knowledge that leads him to the conclusion, but the knowledge is not only sufficient to make it known to the speaker who may choose either a strong epistemic modal like *must* or a weak epistemic modal like *may*.

It is also found that the English epistemic modals under the category of 'core modals' are mostly used to express logics. Here, the choice of the epistemic interpretation is subjective, dependent on the speaker's degree of knowledge. Furthermore, the English pragmatic markers items which are grouped in the lexical verb category like *I think*, *I believe*, *I suppose* and so on are identified to incorporate an indirect evidential or more precisely an inferential evidential.

The incorporation of evidential meaning into the semantic analysis of the items of pragmatic markers is found here to be possibly based upon what is known. As an evidential, pragmatic markers items like *I think* function to play the role of encoding a source of information or evidence on which the speaker makes a statement. In addition, epistemic modals in this current study are found to involve not only epistemic but also evidential aspects. When it comes to the evidential aspect, pragmatic markers is involved in inferential evidential which is one type of indirect evidence in the field of evidentiality. This suggests that the use of the epistemic modal appears to be involved in presuppositions (von Stechow and Iatridou, 2003).

The other important finding regarding the employment of the items of pragmatic markers is that the presuppositions induced by epistemic modals are

compatible with the speaker's evidential judgment. This kind of inference is possible only if the evidence on which the speaker bases his/her statement is compatible with the speaker's evidential judgment; if not, the observable evidence would crash.

It is worth emphasizing that the most frequent epistemic meaning of the modals in this current study is allocated to 'possibility' which has the implication of non-commitment toward the propositions expressed by the writer. In addition to being context-dependent and flexible, the functions served by the use of the items of pragmatic markers identified to be cognitive and interactional functions covering politeness, negotiative and constructive functions. Meanwhile, the meanings of pragmatic markers in this study are found to include necessity, possibility, likelihood, evidentiality, and certainty.

### **PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATION**

The results of the analysis and examination of the use of the items of pragmatic markers here should lead to the pedagogical implications. It is suggested that there are at least two focuses of practical teaching and learning activities on the use of the items of pragmatic markers which need substantial attention.

The first teaching and learning activity is thorough the examination and analysis of the ways grammatical properties of the items of pragmatic markers respond to the interactional needs of the participants of a conversation. This may be done and led to the grammatical or structural semantic description of the pragmatic markers items by taking into account the interactional properties. The second teaching and learning activity that needs to be performed here is the focus on the acquisition of pragmatic markers by the learners of English as a foreign language (EFL), especially at the tertiary level. This is important to do because the items of pragmatic markers are mostly related to the world of knowledge and reasoning.

The acquisition of pragmatic markers may be difficult for learners for several reasons. First, it has been claimed that EFL learners have problems with the notions of necessity and possibility, that is, they may not always identify alternative outcomes of a situation even if they are aware of them (Leech and Short, 2007). Second, although they have acquired the conceptual basis of possibility and necessity, the learners may find it hard to map them onto modal vocabulary. Hence, the learners will be able to associate the word with the action that may require them to perform. Third, EFL learners may face pragmatic problems when acquiring epistemic modals in the sense that they may find it difficult to compute conversational implicatures (Choi, 2006); in particular, they seem to treat statements with epistemic modal items logically and not pragmatically.

One of the ways of presenting the teaching of the items of pragmatic markers through literary



discourses is conducting workshops that may be designed to draw insights from linguistic models and incorporate activities of the same kind when developing any language session. In the case of the teaching materials derived from narrative fictions, special worksheets can be prepared where the use of pragmatic markers items is fore-grounded or where their use is compared when uttered by the characters. Further detailed and focused discussion can be promoted on the writer's style and the way he/she manipulates language to convey various levels of meaning. In short, an integration of language and literary study can be of mutual benefit.

## CONCLUSION

The finding on the use of the items of pragmatic markers in literary discourse suggests that the sampled narrative fiction is compiled on the basis of knowledge and reasoning which also evoke the personal characteristics of Henry James as a philosophical and thoughtful writer (Haralson and Johnson, 2009; Miller, 2005). Most of the findings in the use pragmatic markers indicated that the items of this type of pragmatic markers are used subjectively. Epistemic modals are subjective in the sense that the essence of which is to express the writer's reservation about giving an unqualified to the factuality of the proposition. In other words, subjective statements are statements of opinion or inference rather than statements of fact.

In terms of the meanings of the items of pragmatic markers, it is found that they are actually polysemous in which the polysemy of the items of pragmatic markers is motivated by a metaphorical mapping from the concrete, external world of socio-physical experience to the abstract, internal world of reasoning and mental processes in general. In other words, the items of pragmatic markers are used to display a real polysemous characteristic of literary language expressions, thus rejecting the view that such language expressions are ambiguous between the unrelated senses.

Various functions of the items of pragmatic markers that are found in this study can be broadly grouped into cognitive, pragmatic and interactional. The polyfunctionality of the items of pragmatic markers is motivated by the complex communicative strategies of the addressers and addressees. The pragmatic and interactional functions of the items of pragmatic markers seem to be derived from pragmatic or functional variations of their usage as well as the specific dialogical and interactional contexts. Here, the items of pragmatic markers have the interactional effects in the forms of specific 'shapes of language' (Roudiez, 2008), that is, the low frequency of either modal or propositional negation which then contributes to the creation of an impression of factuality. Equally interesting in the case of the dynamics of the items of pragmatic markers is the importance to teach this category of

pragmatic markers for the EFL learners because pragmatic markers concerns with what is possible or necessary given what is known and what the available evidence is. Thus, semantically epistemic modal items encode modal force and get interpreted against a conversational background which includes the speaker's beliefs or the available evidence.

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